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ABSTRACT

The results of a mental health and mental retardation educational program were reported for the period January 1969 to June 1970. The objectives were to foster and enhance public awareness, interest, and concern for mental health and mental retardation; to inform the population of the services available to meet immediate needs; to educate the population on those factors essential to improving their mental health status; and to stimulate community action necessary for combating mental illness and mental retardation at the local level. Subcommittees of the county Program Building Committees were organized to serve 33 of the 42 pilot counties in the program. The project findings indicated that programs conducted in these counties involved 4,635 persons through individual and group methods, that an estimated 150,200 persons have been reached through the mass media, and that approximately 25,688 bulletins related to mental health and mental retardation and drug abuse were distributed. It was noted that most program emphasis was directed toward creating awareness, interest, and understanding of mental health and mental retardation. (PS)

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MENTAL RETARDATION IN RURAL TEXAS; AN EXAMINATION OF SELECTED COUNTIES*

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Abstract*

Mental Retardation in Rural Texas; An Examination of Selected Counties

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Concern about the number of retarded children in rural areas of the state led the Texas State Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation to approach the problem of identifying such a clientel group. In 1969, through a joint effort with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, such a project was begun. The collective efforts of these two agencies revealed that there are a number of persons in rural areas of the state who are unaware of the signs of mental retardation in certain children, the important role of pre-natal care, and where to find professional assistance with these concerns. This paper reports the objectives, methods, and findings of this joint effort by the above agencies in rural counties of Texas.

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MENTAL RETARDATION IN RURAL TEXAS; AN EXAMINATION OF SELECTED COUNTIES*

This paper reports the results of the mental health and mental retardation educational program developed through a contractual agreement approved in January, 1969 between the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation and the Agricultural Extension Service of Texas A&M University. The report encompasses the time period from the initiation of the project through June 30, 1970. The contract established the objectives of the program which were as follows:

1. To foster and enhance public awareness, interest, and concern for mental health and mental retardation.
2. To inform the population of the MH/MR services available to meet their immediate needs.
3. To educate the population on those factors essential to improving the mental health status of the population.

*This research made possible under Mental Health Formula Grant 89-749 and IAC (68-69)-418.

4. To stimulate community action necessary for combating mental illness and mental retardation at the local level.

The responsibilities of the two organizations and the resources contributed by each in the performance of the contractual agreement were also specified in the contract. Two Mental Health and Mental Retardation Education Specialists were employed by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service and began their efforts during the month of March, 1969.

The MH/MR project was developed in three designated pilot program areas in the state including forty-two counties. The three areas are identified as the Vernon-Wilbarger Area in North Central Texas, the Kerrville-Hill County Area in Central Texas and the Rio Grande Valley Area in Southern Texas. The counties included in these three pilot areas are basically rural counties that are relatively sparsely populated, with the exceptions of Nueces, Webb, and Cameron Counties in the Rio Grande Valley Area. In addition, the selected counties have a relatively low economic base. The three pilot areas are adjacent to the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation facilities located in

Vernon, Kerrville, and Harlingen respectively.

The basic philosophy behind the development of such a project in the three pilot areas was that of the involvement of local people in the study. A second purpose was identification and development of educational programs related to MH/MR in these rural counties. Program development based upon this philosophy was accomplished by the involvement of specialists of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, the county Extension agents in each county, the Program Building Committee and its subcommittees in each county and other resource people that were in positions to make contributions to program development.

The mental health and mental retardation educational program was initiated through conferences with administrative and supervisory personnel of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service who are responsible for the program development in the counties of the three pilot areas. Program development procedural policies, working relationships, and lines of communication were formulated between personnel of the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation and the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. Material was prepared

stating the objectives and giving a brief overall picture of the development of the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Educational Program. The material was then used to help develop awareness, interest, and understanding among the Extension supervisory personnel in the three pilot areas.

Awareness, interest, and support for the program was solicited through a letter sent to each County Judge in the three program areas over the signature of Dr. John Hutchison, Director of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. Copies of the letter were sent to the county Extension staff and the County Judge should confer relative to the situation in their county and the possibility of assessing the status of mental health and mental retardation needs in their particular county.

As an initial step in the involvement of agents in mental health and mental retardation education programs, three training meetings were held. One training meeting was held in each of the three program areas. Personnel from the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation and the Texas Agricultural Extension Service were involved in the development and conducting of these meetings. The purposes of the meetings were to introduce the program and to create interest

among county Extension agents as to the need and desirability of developing programs related to mental health and mental retardation for their counties.

Topics which were discussed at each of these meetings related to educational programming in mental health and mental retardation, mental health and mental retardation services in Texas, the new outlook for mental health and mental retardation, program resources available and information which would facilitate the implementation of county MH/MR educational programs. Following these related presentations there were periods of discussion by the training meeting participants. Each training meeting was concluded with a tour of the local MH/MR state facility.

During March and May, 1970, three workshops were held for the forty-two counties involved in the project. The workshop for the Vernon-Wilbarger Area was held in Vernon on March 30. The workshop for the Kerrville-Hill County Area was held in Kerrville on May 5. For the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the workshop was conducted in Kingsville on May 8. These training meetings were attended by both Extension agents and citizen leaders from the counties involved. Participation

in the workshop lasted one day with both agents and community leaders getting directly involved in an examination of their county needs.

The activities of the day were initiated with the film, "Community Mental Health". Following a brief discussion of the central ideas of this film, an address was delivered to the workshop participants which set the tone for subsequent discussion during the day. This address was titled, "Mental Health and Mental Retardation: Concerns of Our Communities". The balance of the day was spent in workshop groups. The participants were able to choose from four workshop groups and attend two. The topics being discussed were, "Texas De partment of Mental Health and Mental Retardation Resources," "Using Local Resources," "Texas Agricultural Extension Service Resources", and "Planning and Conducting County MH/MR Education Programs". The workshop was concluded with a summary symposium in which each of the group discussion leaders gave a brief summary of the dialogue in his group.

Staff consultations with county Extension staffs and Mental Health and Mental Retardation Education Specialists were later held to go over the various project development

materials and to establish a specific MH/MR educational program development procedure for each county. This seemed to be of assistance to the agents as they went about making contacts for the purpose of organizing subcommittees for studying MH/MR needs in their counties.

Follow-up visits and conferences were held in the counties in the program area assisting the agents and MH/MR subcommittees with specific problems dealing with committee organization, interpreting information, identification of program needs, program planning procedures and the identification of resource persons that could assist in program activities. The nature of the follow-up consultation varied in each county depending upon their particular need and request for assistance. Regional Coordinators of the Regional Programs Division of the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation have been particularly helpful in the follow-up efforts by helping to coordinate the departmental resources with Extension and local program resources.

In order to further support the field agents in the efforts within the counties, a considerable amount of time and effort was devoted to the development and organization of program

resources that might be available to county Extension agents and program committees in the pilot area counties. A set of material was prepared that outlined procedures for agents to use in establishing and working with MH/MR subcommittees, a guide for collecting program background information, and explanation narrative of the program development procedures and a check list of community MH/MR services. In addition to materials developed initially to support the agents in beginning their county level organization, other educational materials were developed by the specialists to maintain programs in the counties in bringing awareness information about mental health and mental retardation to the people in these rural areas of the state.

These additional resource materials were mainly in the form of mass media materials. A series of news articles and radio spots were distributed to all the counties in the program areas. A film list was also developed and distributed. Bulletins concerning mental health and mental retardation were made available for distribution to interested individuals in the counties. A series of mental health and mental retardation information sheets containing general educational informa-

tion was also prepared and made available. All these have been made available to the counties as educational material resources and offered in a supportive way to the initial awareness information provided during the three agent training meetings held in the beginning of the program.

The activities planned and carried out by local MH/MR sub-committees in these rural counties took many forms. Some provided information about the nature, causes, and prevention of mental illness and mental retardation through the mass media serving the community. Other counties published and distributed information regarding the location and availability of services for testing, diagnosis, and treatment of mental illness and mental retardation. Educational meetings were conducted for parents of retarded children and family members of mentally ill persons. This was thought to bring about awareness and understanding about how they might help with out-patient treatment and social adjustment, one of the project alternatives.

Some of the educational programs conducted centered around the development of services or facilities in the county. Such services considered were day-care centers for the mentally

retarded and the provision for special education classes in the local school system. Many of the programs were held with church groups, Home Demonstration Clubs, service clubs, civic organizations, education groups, PTA's, associations for retarded children, and local mental health associations.

Human resources for use with the project were varied. Mostly in the form of speakers, these individuals were scheduled by the specialists to address various groups brought together by the subcommittees. Representatives of the Division of Special Education, Texas Education Agency, spoke on special education. Several professionals from the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation became involved in meetings of the subcommittees. The Regional Coordinators participated on several occasions. Personnel from the state hospitals were involved in several programs. Most of these professionals were able to come when requested and presented informative programs.

Other human resources involved in subcommittee activities were pharmacists speaking on drug abuse, educators speaking on personal adjustment, and doctors speaking on mental health care and mental retardation. Several subcommittees heard lay

people speak concerning mental health and mental retardation as a result of the exchanges which developed among subcommittees in several counties. Much of the awareness program was directly attributable to the use of human resources for the presentation of information concerning mental health and mental retardation.

Also incorporated into the programming were the use of tours as a teaching method. These met with much success in terms of interest. Awareness about state facilities and services seemed to be created as a result of these tours.

Responsible participation in group decisions is basic to democratic theory and to the philosophy of involving local people in this pilot MH/MR project. Consistent with this philosophy, the MH/MR education program in each county of the pilot MH/MR program was developed with the aid of local people. In most counties, this was accomplished through the Extension County Program Building Committee working with the Extension agents located in the county. The responsibility for the MH/MR project was in some cases assigned to an existing committee or a new committee organized to assume the specific responsibilities.

Organized committees of local people were asked to take responsibilities for the development of MH/MR educational

programs to serve thirty-three of the forty-two pilot counties. The Texas Agricultural Extension Service did not have Extension agents in the counties of Jim Hogg and Duval. Zapata County had not had an Extension agent for many years. One was employed in April of 1970. Consequently, these counties did not have Program Building Committees nor the personnel through which a MH/MR project could be channeled. The counties of McMullen, Starr, and Baylor, in general, are sparsely populated and served by one agent. The Program Building Committees in these counties did not take action to establish MH/MR educational programs. Agents in these counties assisted personally and did some of the educational work in the area of mental health and mental retardation. Throckmorton, Gillespie, and Kendall Counties were in the process of organizing committees when the project terminated.

The reported developments of the MI/MR educational programs by counties in the pilot program areas are presented in Table I and serve only as indicators of the committee efforts and program activity results.

Table I

SUMMARY OF PROJECT RESULTS BY COUNTIES IN PILOT AREAS

County	MH/MR Committee Established	Number on Committee	Submitted MH/MR Program Plans for 1970-71
VERNON-WILBARGER AREA			
Archer	yes	7	yes
Baylor	no	-	no
Childress	yes	8	yes
Cottle-King	yes	9	yes
Dickens	yes	10	yes
Foard	yes	5	yes
Hall	yes	3	yes
Hardemann	yes	5	yes
Haskell	yes	5	no
Knox	yes	7	yes
Throckmorton	*	-	no
Wilbarger	yes	9	yes
Young	yes	15	yes
KERRVILLE-HILL COUNTY AREA			
Edwards	yes	3	no
Sutton	yes	5	yes
Bandera	yes	12	yes
Gillespie	*	-	yes
Kendall	*	-	yes
Kerr	yes	17	yes
Kimble	yes	5	yes
Llano	yes	9	yes
Mason	yes	10	yes
Menard	yes	6	yes
Real	yes	3	no

*In initial stages of committee organization

(Table I continued)

County	MH/MR Committee Established	Number on Committee	Submitted MH/MR Program Plans for 1970-71
RIO GRANDE VALLEY AREA			
Bee	yes	12	yes
Live Oak	yes	7	yes
McMullen	no	-	no
Aransas-San Patricio	yes	13	yes
Kleberg-Kenedy	yes	23	yes
Brooks	yes	10	yes
Cameron	yes	6	yes
Jim Wells	yes	15	yes
Nueces	yes	14	yes
Starr	no	-	no
Webb	yes	4	yes
Willacy	yes	13	yes
Zapata	no	-	no
Duval (No agent)	no	-	no
Jim Hogg (No agent)	no	-	no

Summary of Project Results

Subcommittees of the county Program Building Committees were organized to serve thirty-three of the forty-two pilot counties. These committees were made up of three hundred and three committee members who participated in meetings with county Extension agents in organizing and presenting educational programs on mental health and mental retardation. The project findings indicate that programs conducted in the pilot MH/MR counties have involved 4,635 persons through individual and

group methods. An estimated 150,200 persons have been reached through mass media methods. Approximately 25,688 bulletins related to mental health and mental retardation and drug abuse were distributed during educational programs presented by the committees and Extension agents. Most program emphasis was directed toward creating awareness, interest, and understanding of mental health and mental retardation.